

ENOUGH ROOM
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Honorable Members of
the Cambridge City Council
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Potemkin Villages in Cambridge

Grigori Aleksandrovich Potemkin lived from 1739 to 1791 in the Former Soviet Union. He was an admirer of Queen Catherine the Great. When she travelled across the countryside Potemkin would arrange for false fronted buildings and crowds to cheer as the Queen rode by. This was before Hollywood perfected manipulating perceptions.

How many other creations of the Former Soviet Union has Cambridge adopted? Like the false fronted towns in Russia, the Cambridge (and Boston) political establishment create city agencies and organizations that appear to do what their name implies.

One example is the Cambridge Human Rights Commission. One might expect that this agency would search out human rights violations among government agencies and corporations who abuse vulnerable citizens. Not quite. In 2000 the Cambridge Human Rights Commission gave an award to a landlord for not raising his rents as much as other Cambridge landlords. This is to be commended. But is this worthy of a human rights award?

Cambridge city ordinances define the mission of the Human Rights Commission as addressing violations of discrimination laws by employees and agencies of the city government and anyone who does business within the City. But the previous two executive directors, one a lawyer, refused to take any complaints against any city employees.

As a member of the Massachusetts Association of Human Rights Commissions members attend dinners with other Human Rights Commissions in the commonwealth. They also conduct annual essay writing contests, as does the Human Rights Commission in Arlington, MA.

Cambridge also has a Commission for Persons with Disabilities. They provide education materials for others including but not limited to the city, state and US laws on discrimination based upon disabilities. One would expect that the members and the employees of that commission would know the laws they teach to others. Yet in April 2001 a long term employee (or commissioner) questioned a legally disabled citizen of Cambridge as to what his (or her) source of income was. Suggesting that the caller's source of income was suspect, she asked "was there some determination" suggesting also that the citizen was mentally ill?

Being mentally ill or disabled in any manner shape or form is not an issue when it comes to discrimination. The legal issue is whether or not a public official or a public accommodation discriminated based upon a perceived disability. The law clearly states

that it does not matter if the person discriminated against is indeed disabled only that he or she was perceived to be disabled.

Yet the commissioner of the Cambridge Commission on Persons with Disabilities clearly discriminated based upon a perceived disability and source of income. Two specifically stated legal prohibitions.

If the Cambridge Commission on Persons with Disabilities cannot treat persons with disabilities the same as others, what is to be expected from others?

In Cambridge one would expect that community and neighborhood organizations represent the interests of persons who live in the neighborhood. One such organization is the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association (MCNA) for the area adjacent to Harvard University from Harvard Square to about Prospect Street covering Cambridge Street and Broadway.

Through 2000 The Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Preservation Commission held about eight hearings on Harvard's proposed Knafel Center. This government complex of two huge buildings will if allowed destroy another residential neighborhood, a historical pattern of Harvard development.

City commissions are expected to represent the interests of the city not the interests of Harvard. But most often they are staffed by Harvard partisans. They do read Sun Tzu at Harvard about infiltrating.

Though petitioners are not sworn to tell the truth before city commissions there is a state law that makes it a crime to get a benefit from the city through lies.

Uniformly every member of the community who testified at the eight hearings on the Knafel Center spoke against this project. Only employees of Harvard spoke in favor of it. Yet in 2001 a prominent Harvard University professor of government testified before the Board of Zoning Appeals that there was extensive support among members of the community for this project. The President of the MCNA mentioned that there was widespread opposition to the project but his concern was couched in architectural and zoning terms not as the leadership of citizens who strongly opposed that project. One ponders the potential for the president of MCNA to be a Harvard partisan if not a lobbyist for developers.

In the film Wag the Dog Robert DeNiro explained that perception is reality. If it appears on TV it must be true. City commissions acting in the interests of Harvard do not create support from the community.

Current revelations of abuses by the Boston FBI exposes a national Potemkin Village. One expects to be protected from crime by the FBI. Instead current FBI practices target the whistleblowers, making crime families partners in law enforcement. J. Edgar Hoover's worst fears came to pass. The FBI is corrupted by the crime families.

It is time to tear down these false fronts and place persons with proper training in positions of power. The current government administrators are too concerned with their own interests, or the interests of Harvard's \$19 billion endowment.

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Communication #1

A communication was received from Roy Bercaw, Editor, Enough Room, regarding the mission of Human Rights Commission, Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

In City Council April 23, 2001

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